

Bringing the Prophets to Life

Weekly insights into the Haftara
by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler
Author of Bringing the Prophets to Life (Gefen Publ.)

Why Yirmiyahu? Because!

Pi-N'CHAS - 22 p'sukim
- Yirmiyahu 1:1-2:3

In the closing years of the eleventh century, Rabbi Avraham ben David [Ra'avan], quoted the tradition found in the p'sikta that the first two p'rakim of Sefer Yirmiyahu were to be read as the haftarot for the first two Shabbatot of the "Three Weeks". Since these days, known by Chazal as T'LAT D'PURANUTA [the three weeks of 'calamity'] lead to Tish'a b'Av, it is no surprise that our ancient scholars would have established these prophecies, depicting the sins of Israel and their likely punishments, to be read on these Shabbatot.

We might wonder, however, why these specific nevu'ot were chosen. After, all, anyone familiar of the books of nevi'im acharonim, the latter prophets, would know well of the many prophetic admonitions that warned the nation what would befall them were they to refuse to atone for the sins. Indeed, the books of Yishayahu, Yechezkel, Hoshei'a, Amos,

Micha and others, are filled with the prophetic entreaties for the sinful generations to abandon their corrupt ways.

Why then, did Chazal specifically choose Yirmiyahu's messages to open these days of sadness?

Truthfully, the answer would seem to be quite simple!

1. It was Yirmiyahu who would live through the tragic era.
2. He would be imprisoned and be thrown into the pit.
3. He would be the navi who was denigrated and despised throughout his service.
4. It was he who would witness and suffer through the destruction of the Mikdash.
5. And it would be this tragic prophet who shed his tears as he wrote Eicha.

He certainly was the fitting choice to have his warnings passed down to the future generations as a perpetual reminder to the nation.

Rav Ya'akov Meidan asks a similar question. However, he does not wonder why Chazal decided to select Yirmiyahu's haftarot - for, as we saw, our scholars understood what Yirmiyahu would go through in the future years, which made his message even more powerful. Rather, he asks why Hashem selected this

specific individual to prophesy to the doomed generation even before this person was born! Our haftara reveals this decision of G-d in His first words to Yirmiyahu: B'TEREM ETZORCHA BABETEN Y'DA'ATICHA... NAVI LA-GOYIM N'TATICHA - "Even before I formed you in the womb... I appointed you to be a prophet to the nations!"

This is a remarkable statement - and one that brings us to the question: Why did G-d choose Yirmiyahu before he was even born? What possible reason did Hashem have for deciding on this yet-to-be-born child as His navi? Simply - what made him so special before he was capable of doing anything at all?

Rav Meidan reminds us that, as the opening of our haftara states, Yirmiyahu was a Kohen, dwelling in Anatot. This portion of land was inherited by the priestly family of Evyatar, the Kohen Gadol during the reign of David HaMelech. It is quite probable, therefore, that Yirmiyahu was a direct descendant of Evyatar, and that would also mean that his roots go back to the Kohen Gadol Eili, who died upon hearing of the destruction of Mishkan in Shiloh.

This tragedy was seen by Chazal as a punishment for Eili HaKohen, the Kohen Gadol of the time, who failed to condemn his sons' defilement of the holy Mishkan. Years later, Evyatar was banished from the k'huna, a

penalty that was seen as part of the G-d's "curse" of Eili's family. [see M'lachim Alef 2:26-27].

The centuries passed and as Eili's descendant stood before a sinful nation - a generation who also defiled the sanctity of the Mikdash - he prophesied the fall of the Beit HaMikdash with the stinging words: K'SHILOH YIHYEH HABAYIT HAZEH!, "This Temple shall fall as did Shilo!" [Yirmiyahu 26:9].

The scion of a Kohanic family - those who were burdened with the blame for the destruction of the first Mishkan - was surely the perfect person to stand before the sinful nation and remind them of the fall of the previous sanctuary.

Truly, who was more fitting to teach the future of what their sins will bring, than the heir of those who carried that burden! ✨